

Book Reviews

Observations of Wildlife, by Peter Scott. Foreword by HRH the Duke of Edinburgh. Phaidon, £7.95.

This is essentially a picture book consisting of beautifully reproduced paintings and drawings in colour and black and white, chosen from Sir Peter's production stretching over half a century. As he points out, his pictures ought to speak for themselves – and so they do. Nevertheless, the supporting text dealing with the artist's problems, both of style and technique, is full of interest. It throws sidelights on events and personalities connected with the development of wildlife conservation in our time, more particularly with the organisations in which Sir Peter has been so deeply involved, the Wildfowl Trust, fFPS, IUCN and WWF. He touches on a wide variety of bird topics – bird-lore, how to create a reserve or build a hide, the problems of arousing public support or of breeding in captivity, and his travels as a naturalist in many lands.

But the essence of the book is in the pictures. Sir Peter argues that, without trying to outdo the photographer in realism, the artist should produce a portrait of man or bird which is recognisable. He is glad that it is obvious whether his pictures have been hung right way up or not and that any knowledgeable naturalist can identify the species he paints. Views on style differ and your reviewer has no qualifications as an art critic. The most he can say is that Sir Peter's pictures have their own character and individuality: when you see one, even on the opposite wall of an art gallery, you know it is a Peter Scott. This collection is a delight to the bird-lover and reveals the artist's predilections as well as his skill. There are a few drawings of mammals and paintings of fishes, whales and even Nessies, but the bulk of the book is devoted to ducks, geese and swans. Sir Peter writes, 'I like to draw or paint something every day of my life.' This artistic urge and the love of nature that shines through all his pictures together account for the book.

G. T. CORLEY SMITH

Stones of Silence, by George B. Schaller, Deutsch, £6.95.

George Schaller, already famous for highly original work on the gorilla and the lion (among others), must have found such creatures child's play relative to seeking out the larger animals among the largest mountain range on Earth. His travels, and travails, are the material of this latest book, sub-titled 'Journeys in the Himalaya'. The reader, astounded by Schaller's tenacity and ability, is knocked sideways further by the foreign profusion of people, places, animals. Who or what, in this land of Swat and Shey, are Argali, Altai, Aoudad, Arkari, Bharal, Bhote kosi, Dhole, Chitral, Gaur, Dolpo, Goral, Dir, Markhor, Salt, Tahr, Yasin? Ten out of ten for all *Oryx* readers who recognised the odd-numbered animals against the even-numbered places.

Logically Schaller starts off this book where his scientific treatise on the Himalayan sheep and goats ends. He quotes the naturalist William Beebe's need for 'softening facts with quiet meditation, leavening science with thoughts of the sheer joy of existence'. This he does excellently. 'I can feel the difference,' Schaller writes, when there is no large predator in the area. 'There is less vitality, less natural tension.' 'My ancestors lived like this,' he muses, when passing through a primitive village, before adding: 'And perhaps some day my descendants.' But always the driving force is not for experience, or people, or places new. It is for the animals. 'Poets may praise the deer and the nightingale. I celebrate the wild goat.' And so he does in this book, along with every other aspect of nature that strikes his eye and fancy.

It is a muddle of a book, much as any walk is a muddle, with thoughts trampling upon each other, and observations, and bits of fact, and practical problems. There is bureaucracy, political awkwardness, and mere domestic hazard: he liked coffee, the staff liked tea, so they made it half and half. Anyway, what a journey (it took three